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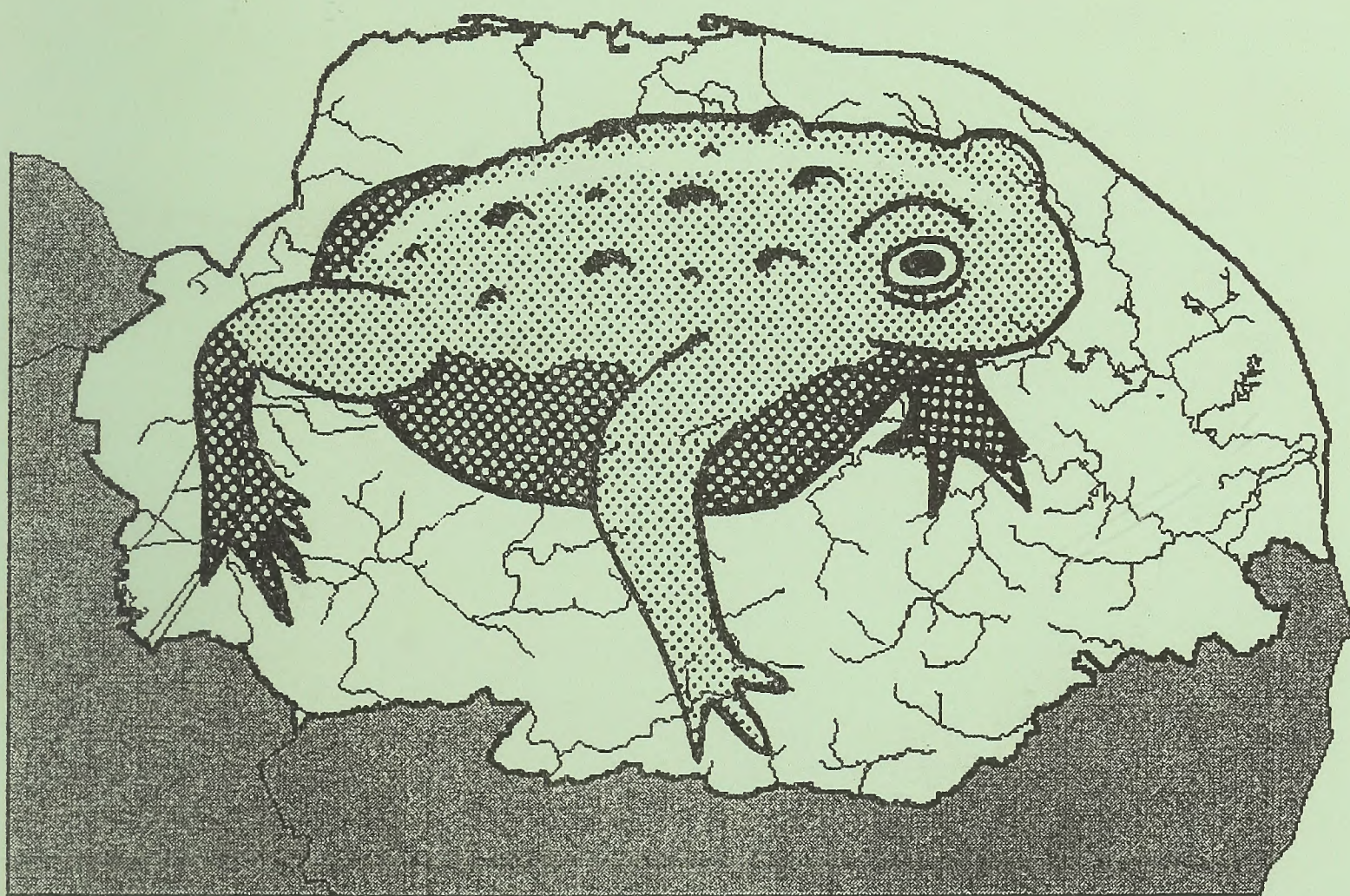
07 JUN 2007

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The Norfolk *Natterjack*

The quarterly bulletin of the Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society



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Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

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Articles with the camera symbol have associated photographs in the Nats' Gallery (centre pages)

Toad-in-the-hole....

You too can be a field naturalist - this summer there are a number of surveys both local and national that aim to get you out and about. See pages 14 and 15 for details. If you also think helping with displays and exhibitions is more to your taste or selling and/or distributing the Society's publications, then check out page 11. Again this edition has a great Nats' Gallery and fine articles. My thanks to all contributors and I hope some interesting, unusual or just something from Norfolk's vast array of wildlife is observed and/or captured by your camera and shared in the next 'Natterjack'. Have a good summer.

FF

Disposal of Back Numbers of NNNS Transactions

07 JUN 2007

It has been agreed by Council that the majority of back numbers of Transactions can be disposed of, with the retention of just a few of each part. Libraries and institutions have already been contacted and supplied where possible. The remaining parts are being offered to current members. It has been suggested that a donation of £1 per part received should be made to the Society. Any distribution costs will be discussed with the recipient.

By no means all parts are available; in broad terms:

Vols 1 –12	1870-1930	Virtually none
Vols 13 – present	Most available but not all; some in small numbers	

Anyone wanting back numbers should send their 'wants list' to Tony Leech (3 Eccles Road, Holt, Norfolk, NR25 6HJ; leech@dialstart.net). Because of the way in which they are stored it may take quite a while to get the parts together but requests will be treated on a 'first come – first served' basis.

Back numbers are occasionally returned to the Society and I will maintain a wants list for those parts which cannot be supplied.

Please note that requests for back numbers of Bird & Mammal Reports should be directed to David Paull who can supply those still available at agreed prices.

Plans for making the text of all Transactions available as pdf files online are in hand

Tony Leech



A moss fungus - *Arrhenia retiruga*

by Robert Maidstone

"Tha's funny!", I thought, "Wher' 've them white petals cum from?" as I looked down at some small white objects on the now leaf free lawn at my feet. I stopped raking up the fallen autumn leaves and looked upwards at the branches overhead. Not that I really thought that a copper Maple, Magnolia or purple-leaved Judas Tree might have small white petals but just in case I has missed a shrub in the some-what overgrown shrubbery that bordered the lawn of the garden in which I was working.

Encumbered with having to wear bifocal glasses, my feet never seem quite in focus (well that's what I say, others blame too many of the other sort of glasses), I knelt down to take a closer, and clearer, look at the white petals.

Once down there I could see that they were not petals but minute white bracket fungi perched three quarters of the way up the stem of some of the moss plants that formed most of the greenery in what was loosely called 'the lawn'. The small section of the moss stem with the triangular leaves above the fungus was a healthy green but the remainder of the stem was a sickly yellow colour. Since moss has no roots as such and gets all its nutrients from the rain and dust that accumulates between the stem and leaves this fungus was preventing the flow of nutrients down into the lower part of the stem.

Unable to find any reference to bracket fungi on moss, they are normally found on trees, in any of my books I had to wait until a meeting of the local naturalist society to give the specimens to a fungus expert. Fortunately both moss and fungi can be carefully dried and stored in that state, then moistened when they return to an almost natural condition so that the identification features can be seen.

So I passed the dried specimens on and in due course had a letter informing me that the fungus was *Arrhenia retiruga*. This fungus is the only member of its family to grow on moss, in this case *Rhydiadelphus squarrosus*, a common moss of woodlands and shady lawns.

This fungus appears to be widespread in Britain but 'rarely reported', according to the National Fungus database, indeed it had only been recorded from one site in Norfolk albeit in two consecutive years prior to my find. After receiving this information I took a look at the mossy grass on the shady side of the Church opposite the garden in which I had made the find without any luck. A few days later in another garden some five miles away I found *A. retiruga* again, on moss in the shaded lawn under some beech trees.



May be we need a few more naturalists with glasses, bifocals of course, so that their blurred vision between the two lenses focal lengths makes them double check what is around them.

SOME RARE BRYOPHYTES



by Colin Dunster

Moss and liverwort hunting is something of a minority sport, mainly because the prey is small and requires some practice to identify. These little plants rarely key out satisfactorily in the handbooks and sometimes require the use of a compound microscope to confirm identification. Nevertheless, once one gets down to their level, they are extremely attractive and every bit as important as their larger cousins, the vascular plants, as indicators of the classification, diversity and health of the habitats in which they occur.

The Norfolk and Suffolk Bryological Group holds fortnightly field recording meetings at weekends from Autumn to Spring at which beginners and experts alike are welcomed. The following are three of the Group's more interesting records from meetings in February 2007 (photos in the centre sheets).

The moss *Rhodobryum roseum* (photo 1) is rare in Norfolk and is declining nationally. It occurs on ant hills on base rich sandy soils or, as here at East Walton Common SSSI, in short calcareous grassland. All that can be seen are the large (for a moss - the leaves are over 5mm long!) terminal rosettes at the top of a stem rising through the vegetation from runners below. In fact it very much resembles a miniature palm tree.

Weeds of arable land have received much attention from botanists in recent years, following a severe decline in diversity, and the situation is no different with bryophytes. A number of species are specialists of stubble or fallow land and are rarely found elsewhere. After a cereal crop has been harvested, the moist bare soil which is exposed is ideal for the development of certain species of mosses and liverworts from spores or sometimes rhizoidal tubers (gemmae) that have lain dormant over the summer. Unfortunately, the modern practice of ploughing soon after harvest and re-sowing in the autumn has meant that these plants often don't get the chance to develop. Although the spores of some of these species seem to have a viable life of many years they cannot last for ever. Just occasionally a field is still left in stubble and, for reasons that are not entirely clear, has retained a rich bank of spores. We visited a memorable example of such a stubble field at Blickling in late February.



Photo 2 shows a typical patch of the mixture of bryophytes that was present over perhaps a couple of acres. The three pale yellowish-green 'calabrese'-like cushions (c. 15 mm diameter) are the liverwort *Sphaerocarpos texanus*, very rare in Norfolk and a nationally declining species. A closer view is shown in photo 3. The body of the plant consists of a flat spreading thallus which in this species is obscured by a mass of spherical capsules contained within inflated involucre-like sacs giving a most distinctive appearance. These capsules contain the spore clusters which turn black as they ripen and are shed as the plant decays.

The three dark green and rather frilly rosettes, which can be seen between the cushions of *Sphaerocarpos* in photo 2, are of the primitive liverwort *Antheros agrestis*. This odd little arable specialist is also declining nationally and is extremely rare in Norfolk. Although it was abundant at this site, this was only the third record for the county. Photo 4 gives a closer view of the structure with the unusual thread-like capsules emerging from a tubular involucre.

Of course the arable bryologist doesn't stop at the rareties; it is a matter of honour to identify and record every species present and a careful look at photo 2 will give some idea of the problems. There are at least four more species of moss and one of liverwort in this frame, two of them far from common, but, regrettably, there is not space to go into all these here. If you feel you must know more, come and join us at one of our field meetings and discover the joy of crawling about in a wet cold field in mid winter!

Nesticus cellulanus Is this as Scarce as Records Show?

by Peter Nicholson



I was recently asked to visit a site near to Hoveton by Stewart Wright a keen naturalist and member of Norfolk and Norwich Naturalist Society. He had come across a spider which had attracted his attention in one of the glass/green houses he was responsible for. *Nesticus cellulanus* is a species which requires damp conditions and prefers dark and shady places. It is generally associated with caves, mines, cellars, drains and in this particular case the underside of a timber trapdoor covering a reservoir for water in the floor of the greenhouse.

On being shown the species, which were not immediately obvious, the colouration varied from being a pale brown colour to an off white to pale yellow with little or no annulations to the legs. This is not the colour or pattern expected when referring to Roberts. Examination of various specimens showed that the



females found were mature but the males not, this being early February. It should be noted that mature spiders are generally found in most seasons. As for the variation in colour Bristowe states that those that live in darkness are paler than others collected in place where there is light and this seems to be born out here.

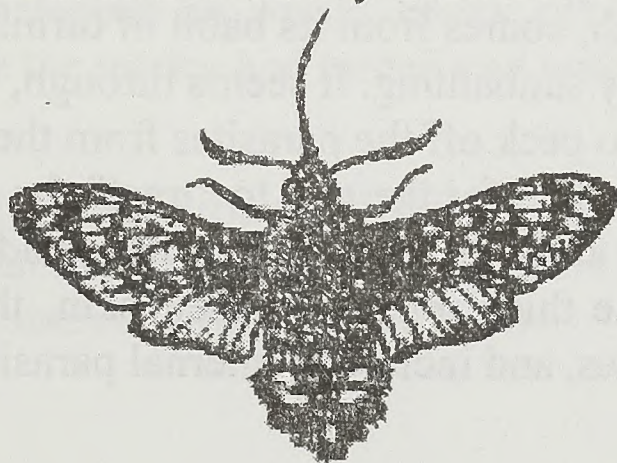
Having identified the species I was concerned at the variation in pattern and had the species confirmed by Peter Harvey. I was also surprised to find how under recorded this species is. In Norfolk there are no records on the British Arachnological Society database or other County records which I have to hand. There appears to be only one in Suffolk and Essex in fact according to the NBN Gateway there is a lack of records in the South East in total. Is this a true reflection of reality?

WINTER HUMMER

by Colin & Karen Dunster

It is considered to be a sure sign of global warming that we have all been used to seeing increasing numbers of hummingbird hawk-moths (*Macroglossum stellatarum*) over the past few years. Indeed our records in the garden here at Thurgarton have been in double figures for each of the last three years between late May and September. It was sad to think that these spectacular visitors from the south were all doomed to die of cold as soon as winter set in. Now all that has changed!

On March 11th of this year, an unseasonably warm and sunny late winter day, my wife and I were amazed to see one of these fine moths alive and well in the garden. It was somewhat surreal to see it hovering at *Pulmonaria* and *Aubrietia* rather than the usual jasmine or phlox. It was far too early to be a migrant and must have found itself a warm and sheltered place, probably in a building, to overwinter. Perhaps before long we shall regularly see the larva in Norfolk on bedstraws or red valerian as has already been occurring in the south of the country.



Ocean Sunfish (*Mola mola*) on Waxham Beach

by Dr. Bob Leaney



I thought that it might be of interest to report the finding of a dead ocean sunfish on Waxham beach on December 30th 2006. This was a very small specimen, only about 55cm from nose to tail, and 80cms from dorsal to anal fin tip – the “*Mola*” grows to be the biggest of all bony fishes, the record being 3.1m (10ft) x 4.26m (14ft), and weighing 2,235 Kg (4,927 lbs). Another claim to fame is that it seems to produce the greatest number of eggs of any vertebrate species: a medium sized specimen was found to contain around 300 million!

As the german name “Schwimmerkopf” or “Swimming head” suggests, it is a remarkable and unmistakable fish, flattened vertically and having apparently lost its body in development. It only has two fins, one above and one below, right at the rear and joined by a nearly straight frill like tail, developed from the rear fins. There are two other species in the genus *Mola*, the sharp-tailed mola and the slender mola, but as the names suggest these are very different looking creatures indeed.

The ocean sunfish is in all the oceans, as they seem to drift in a haphazard fashion much like the gelatinous zooplankton they mainly feed on – small jellyfish, salps and ctenophores (or comb jellies). They are quite commonly seen off the SW coast of Britain, but are seldom reported from the North Sea – only around one per year from Norfolk.

The sunfish has a mouth that looks like a triggerfish and it is indeed another member of the Order Tetraodontiformes, which have four teeth fused into a beak, and including boxfish, porcupinefish and pufferfish. When young the sunfish looks like a spiny pufferfish with great big eyes and it retains its ability to suck in water, not to blow itself up, but in order to suck in and blow out the planktonic animals it feeds on, breaking them up in its spiny throat so that they can be better swallowed.

The English name, sunfish, comes from its habit of turning over on its side on the surface and apparently sunbathing. It seems through, that the fish is inviting gulls and other seabirds to peck off the parasites from the skin. Molas have been seen to turn over after a while for the gull to “treat” the other side and even apparently to blow water at the gulls when they have had enough! Despite the attention of gulls and the thick mucus on their skin, they are still host to numerous surface parasites, and including internal parasites, support a massive 40 parasitic genera.



These parasites are of great interest to marine biologists and when I reported this find to the Society marine referee, Dr. Hamond, he requested that I looked again for fish lice and any other parasites, and send them to him for study. Unfortunately someone had carted off the fish by the next day, so I was unable to help!

Dr. Hamond tells me that he would be very interested to receive specimens of the surface parasites from any further sunfish finds. The fish lice usually found are flattened crustaceans rather like cockroaches, and should be removed with large forceps and put in a dry container for transport.

An excellent and very informative website on Molas can be found on Google under "Ocean Sunfish".

LITTLE OWL

by Tony Howes



I was told of a little owl that could often be seen perched in the entrance of a tree cavity and as I have never been able to photograph this species in the past I followed it up. For the first several outings for this I met with failure due to the owl not playing ball. Looking back I had assumed, wrongly as it turned out, that the best time would be late afternoon or evening, what it loved doing in fact was sun bathing in the middle of the day when the sun was shining full on the cavity.

Another assumption that was dispelled was that it would be dozing during the daylight hours, wrong again, it was in fact very alert to all that was going on outside the cavity, and watched every movement from bird or beast with great interest. On the opposite side of the road a couple of tractors were working, the owl would twist its head round to watch a tractor approaching the road, as it got close and the noise increased he would scurry off deeper in to the hole, reappearing again once the tractor had turned and was on its way back up the field.

I became quite fond of my new found friend, we were almost on first name terms, (?) I shall keep an eye on the situation with the hope that there will be the rasping of tiny claws come June time. (see photo)



Cley Quest

by Brian Macfarland



I went to Cley with Tony Howes for the express purpose to hopefully see, and photograph three bird species.

The day was pleasantly sunny but an extremely cold wind kept our eyes watering. However we arrived at the beach car park about 10am. We started to walk along the gravel beach on the land side of the ridge. The idea was to try and flush out some shore larks, which we heard had been seen that morning. We did not have to go far before a small flock of 8 birds appeared at a distance of 200yards landing on the beach. They were very active and were soon up in the air again. Fortunately for me one briefly landed about 15 yards away. So I was able to get a couple of shots before it flew away along with the rest. First specie was now in the bag.

We moved further along the beach to look for snowbuntings, and turnstones. We were not disappointed. The turnstones numbered 14 plus, and the snowbuntings roughly 24. The area had been fed by various people over many days so the birds kept returning to the same spot. This meant we just had to stay in the same place, and wait for them to come. We were amazed how tame they were, and they came within 10 feet of us for minutes at a time. The pictures show male and female buntings, turnstones, and a solitary dunlin.

What a wonderful privilege to be so close to these wild birds. After 4 hours we finally returned to the car feeling elated, but frozen solid from the biting wind.

SNOW BUNTINGS

by Tony Howes



This delightful little bird is a winter visitor to Norfolk, often found in smallish numbers along the shingle ridges, or just inland, on the north Norfolk coast. They arrive during autumn and have usually departed again by the end of March and sustain themselves by foraging for various salt-marsh and dune plant seeds. On the ground they tend to creep about, keeping very low, at times becoming difficult to see, so well do they harmonize with their surroundings.

The flocks, usually between a dozen and fifty or so in number can be very skittish at times, taking to wing without apparent provocation and with undulating flight have a little sortie along the coast, and very often coming back a few minutes later to the same area.

Just before their departure some of the males may start acquiring their black and white beautiful breeding plumage. (see photo)



NATS' GALLERY: May 2007

OCEAN SUNFISH

Mola mola,
Waxham

30 December
2006 (see
article).

Photo:
Dr. Bob
Leaney.



RUE-LEAVED SAXIFRAGE

Saxifraga tridactylites, Norwich
(Natural England offices), 30 March
2007. One of several 'spring ephemerals'
that flower early in the year and then dry
up and vanish. The species was also found
growing on the river bridge at the bottom
of Prince of Wales Road. Photos: Dougal
McNeill.





GLAUCOUS GULL

Salthouse, February. Identified as a 1st winter bird by the dark eye and bill-tip (see article). Members with long memories will remember the adult Glaucous Gull, known as 'George' that spent the winter along this stretch of coast between 1963 and 1979 (followed by 'Son of George' from 1982 to 1990). Photo: *Hans Watson*.



LITTLE EGRET (left) and **RUDDY SHELDUCK**: elegant birds chanced upon at Ringland in early March. Below an ever-alert **LITTLE OWL** at Molton and dapper **SNOW BUNTINGS** at Salthouse beach (see articles).
Photos: Tony Howes.





ARABLE BRYOPHYTES

at Blickling, February 2007. Over-wintering stubbles hold an unusual moss and liverwort flora. This photo shows the liverworts *Antheros agrestis* and *Sphaerocarpos texanus* (plus at least four species of moss and an additional liverwort). See article. Photo: Colin Dunster.



THE LIVERWORT

Sphaerocarpos texanus, Blickling, February 2007, forming pale yellowish-green 'calabrese'-like cushions c. 15 mm in diameter. Very rare in Norfolk and a nationally declining species. Photo: Colin Dunster.

THE PRIMITIVE LIVERWORT

Antheros agrestis, Blickling, February 2007. The third record for Norfolk. This odd little arable specialist is also declining nationally, but was abundant at this site. Photo: Colin Dunster.



**RICCIA
SOROCARPOS**
and
**SPHAEROCARPOS
TEXANUS,**

Blickling, February 2007.

Photo: Colin Dunster.



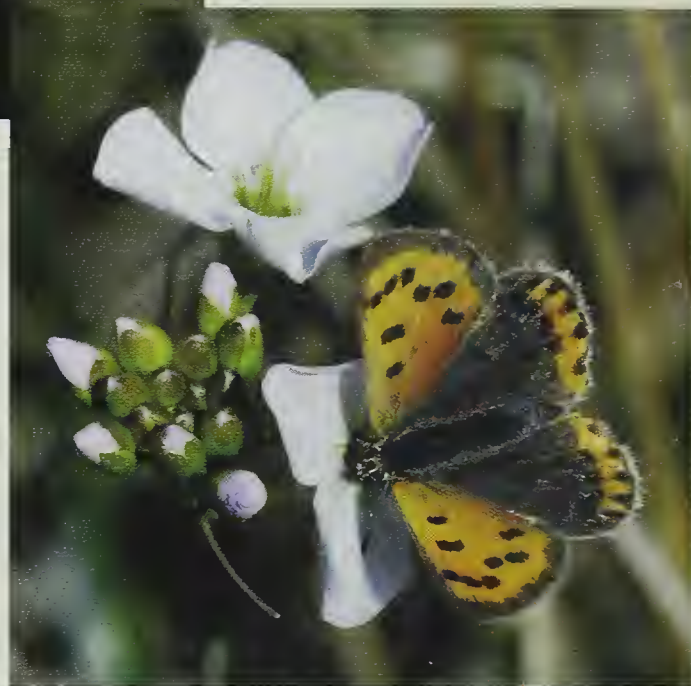
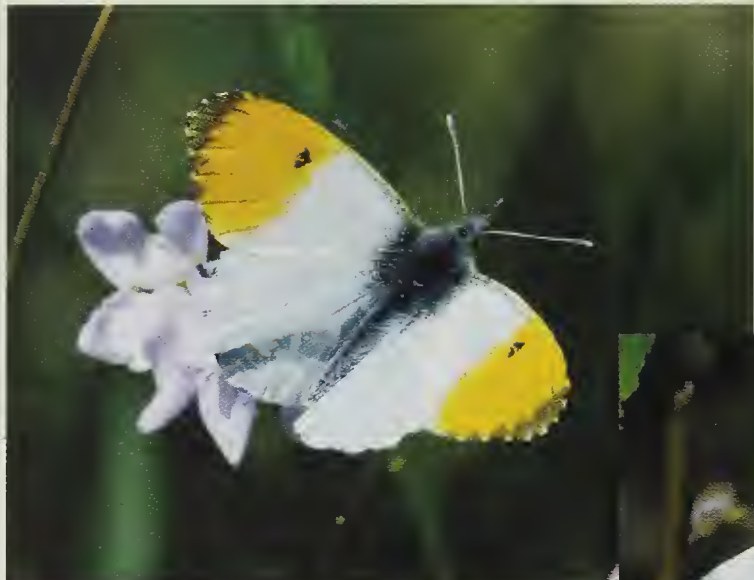
RHODOBRYUM ROSEUM

East Walton Common. This moss grows in short grass on calcareous substrates. It is rare in Norfolk and declining nationally.

Photo: Colin Dunster.

HOOKERIA LUCENS Holt Lowes, January 2007. Rare in E England, it was new to science when found on the Lowes in c. 1807 by William Hooker. He went on to become curator of Kew Gardens and the moss was named in his honour. Photo: Simon Harrap/norfolknature.co.uk.





SPRING BUTTERFLIES Clockwise: Orange-tip (male and female), Speckled Wood, Small Copper and Holly Blue. In the warmest April on record, most of Norfolk's butterflies appeared 17 days earlier than normal. *Photos: Simon Harrap/norfolknature.co.uk.*

WILDFOWL
at Welney.
Pochards, Coots
and Mute and
Whooper
Swans enjoying
a handout of
grain. *Photo: Bob
Blandford.*



FLOODING AT CLEY (the East Bank looking eastwards towards Salhouse). The sea overtopped the shingle bank on 20 March 2007, but flooding was relatively limited and recent works to improve drainage meant that the flood waters dispersed quickly. *Photo: Colin Dunster.*



CLEY COASTGUARDS (looking west). The Half Moon Pit, here engulfed by the floods, was almost dry in July 2006. This saline pool supports Spiral Tasselweed and Starlet Sea Anemone (see *Natterjack* February 2006), but for how long? *Photo: Colin Dunster.*

ECO-FRIENDLY VISITOR CENTRE at Welney Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust reserve. Use of rain water, solar power and reedbed filtration combine with improved visitor facilities to pull the crowds (see article). *Photo: Bob Blandford.*



HARPALUS FROELICHII

'Brush-thighed Seed-eating Beetle'. Mothers are requested to look for this scarce beetle in their moth traps. The subject of a Biodiversity Action Plan, it has been recorded primarily in Breckland, but any records will help in the drafting of a meaningful document (see article).

Photo: John Walters.



HARLEQUIN LADYBIRD

Harmonia axyridis. Introduced to Europe from North America in 1998, it reached the UK in 2004.

See 'Survey Spotlight'. Photos: (above, Lydd-on-Sea) Ian Woiwod, (right, Gt Yarmouth) Francis Farrow.



NESTICUS CELLULANUS,

Hoveton. The first record for Norfolk, but is this spider really so scarce? (see article). Photo: Peter Nicholson.



The Eyes have it

by Hans Watson



During February, I was walking back to my car at Salthouse beach, when I met a group of twitchers who asked me if I had seen the glaucous gull. I then became involved in their almost heated discussion, about the age of the gull that they had just been watching, with some saying it was far too pale to be a first winter bird, and therefore must be second winter. At that time I had only seen the bird at about a quarter of a mile range in the rain, and so I could not volunteer an opinion, but I made a mental note to return later in the week, in better weather to see the bird.

On the drive home I considered the twitcher's debate, and found myself sympathising with their dilemma. Gulls, after all, can pose many problems, not just with determination of age, but also with species. Many bird books and field guides give the impression that identification is more straightforward than it is. Age related plumages of young birds are often variable, but an impression is sometimes given in field guides that there is a single first winter plumage, a single second winter plumage etc. Very seldom is eye colour or bill colour even mentioned, and both are important, especially for ageing the larger gulls. In reality, feathers wear and fade, and a bird can look much paler at the end of winter than it looked at the beginning of winter. Leucism and albinism although not common, can occur, and the occasional leucistic herring gull has been mistaken for an Iceland gull, or glaucous gull. Hybrids also cause problems, with second and third generation hybrids causing the most problems.

The biggest problems seem to be encountered with birds of the herring gull/lesser black-back complex. Some authorities maintain that there are as many as eight species in this group whilst other authorities claim that some of these are sub-species or geographic races. It is believed by some ornithologists that the taxonomy of this group is evidence of ongoing rapid evolution. The thought has occurred to me that the race to separate new species, by DNA tests, formulating Ring Species theories and others, may be evidence that some Ornithologists could be evolving into Taxonomists or Geneticists.

With regard to the glaucous gull, I did manage to see and photograph it on a morning when luckily no dog walkers were about to disturb it. It was indeed a pale coloured bird, but it had dark coloured eyes typical of first winter birds, and the bill was black from gonys to tip, again typical of first winter birds. Those amongst the twitchers who had identified it as a first winter bird at long range bobbing about on a choppy sea in dull rainy weather had done well, and I take my hat off to them.



VISITORS AT RINGLAND

by Tony Howes



While walking the banks of the upper Wensum at Ringland with my camera in early March, I was fortunate to see and photograph two elegant birds that are associated with water.

The first was a ruddy shelduck in the company of half a dozen Egyptian geese, they were out in the middle of a wet grazing marsh, but later moved onto the river bank. It was very nervous, and kept right at the back of the group, but eventually I was able to isolate it enough to get a few shots before they all departed for pastures new further up the valley, a beautiful bird to see. There was no leg ring so its origin is in doubt. (see photo)

The second bird was seen at distance flying towards me. At first, because of its colour, I mistook it for a gull, but as it got closer I could see it was a little egret, it passed right over head, giving me the chance of a couple of shots before it was out of range,

These gorgeous pure white herons are on the increase in Norfolk now, mainly near the coast, but this was the first time I had seen one so far inland. (see photo)

Acorn Delight

by Averil Monteath

I always say that our garden, on the edge of a wood, is a wildlife haven, and certainly having a family of roe deer frisking and drinking from the pond with hares, stoats, weasels, and tits galore can be a delight (squirrels, muntjac, moles and pheasants less so); but I was rather bemused when I attacked my pile of mushroom compost, about 6 feet by 6 feet, and 3 feet high to find something had scraped into it a cache of acorns.

The pile, situated under an oak tree, had been sitting there since the autumn, and I had found acorns when I had taken the odd wheelbarrow of compost away, but come late winter I stuck into it seriously.

I thought at first that a squirrel must have made the cache but there were no signs of its presence, apart from the first scrape, but then I found it went further and further in, so I started counting the acorns.

The first evening I found 400 acorns all tightly packed together, so I thought I must get to the bottom of it. The next day I unearthed 800 more (though I



must admit that I could have been the odd hundred out), 150 was the poor score for the next day, and although I had other things to do for the next day or so I did notice squirrels and wood pigeons having a field day at the heap. About 600 more acorns turned up over the next couple of days, including a neat little ball of dried oak leaves deep inside the compost heap. The final days score was 500, so there must have been 2400/2500 acorns nearly covering the whole base of the compost heap.

A fantastic job, I presume for a small family of wood mice, unless anyone has other ideas?

Incidentally the acorns were at various stages of germination, with a few decayed and a handful partly eaten.



ANY VOLUNTEERS

The Society will be putting up a display stand at the following events:

'Wild About the Wensum' on Saturday 19th May 2007 at Pensthorpe.

'Wild About Norfolk' on Saturday & Sunday 8th & 9th September 2007
at Notcutts Garden Centre, Norwich.

If you can offer a couple of hours of help, or you have ideas for display material, do please contact me.

Dilys Jones dilys.jones2@btinternet.com Tel: 01603 454683

SALES HELP NEEDED

We are looking for a person to join the NNNS Publications Committee to oversee the sales of the Society's publications (primarily the Bird & Mammal Report) to non-members.

The main part of the work involves supplying publications, sending out invoices and collecting payments. It is hoped that such a person would also be able to increase the number of sales outlets and opportunities.

To find out more, please contact the Chairman of the Publications Committee, Tony Leech (leech@dialstart.net or 01263 712282).



The New Eco-Friendly Visitor Centre at Welney.

by Bob Blandford



The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust's new ecological visitor centre at Welney, has been open since April 24th 2006 and to quote directly from the centre's leaflet: "it is host to a whole range of environmentally friendly systems including loos flushed with rainwater, electricity generated by the sun, heating sourced direct from the earth and reedbeds used to clean waste water".

My wife Allyson and I have been there twice during its first swan season and we cannot cease to be amazed and delighted. The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust's motto has always been "Saving wetlands for wildlife and people". It is quite clear that people are still very much part of the equation at Welney. You could spend quite some time in the new visitors centre itself before proceeding over to the hides if you wanted to. For meals and light refreshments, you go up to the first floor for the widgeon café. On the same floor, is the centre's shop that sells a variety of relevant goods including a large stock of natural history books. Then back downstairs for the Fenlands World exhibition room, which is quite a treat with its ongoing film presentations at individual showing points and other exhibits. Then up the stairs again to reach the bridge that crosses the road and two rivers in order to get to the reserve. Disabled people are still able to share in the joy of seeing and hearing the swans. In fact, they now have a super lift from the visitor centre up to the bridge. Welney has long had a heated observatory with large windows and now its wing hides have been substantially renovated.

We were glad to see that the bust of Sir Peter Scott, the Trust's founder, has been fetched into the light of the observatory from where it was just outside the door. Lee Marshall, the centre's new manager, told us that there has been an increase in the number of people visiting since the new centre opened and that more school parties have been accommodated. Allyson and I had previously regarded Welney mainly as being the place to go to in the winter to see and hear the super whoopers and Bewicks but Lee said that the reserve is also fantastic in the spring and summer for breeding waders such as lapwing, snipe, redshank and avocet. We could not help noticing the large stock of pond dipping equipment at the centre waiting for the new season and also the two video microscopes in the Pond Room. The WWT at Welney can obviously offer young people a vital insight into the natural world. Colleges and schools can book with learning manager Sarah Graves for educational visits throughout the year. Teachers can contact Sarah via her e-mail address: sarah.graves@wwwt.org.uk



Notes on the Floscularia of the Great Yarmouth District

- Read April 29th, 1907

For several years past I have searched for this beautiful fixed Rotiferon in the waters of the Great Yarmouth district, and have been successful in finding them year by year in the same localities, which include the following:- West Caister (next Caister-on-sea). Gt. Ormesby. Burgh Castle (in private lake). Southtown Marshes. Gt. Yarmouth. Fritton Lake. Lound Run.

So far my collections include three species, viz.: *Floscularia ornata*, *F. Cornuta*, and *F. ambigua*.

The animal has a great predilection for various mosses growing at the borders of some of the cleaner ditches, and loves to esconce itself in the hollows of the boat-like leaves of these tiny plants. One year I found *F. ornata* in good quantity on some floating moss in Fritton Lake; these were specially beautiful on account of the absolute transparency of their bodies-a condition peculiar to most lacustrine Rotifers. These have generally been associated with *Philodina*, *Rotifer vulgaris* and similar forms, but are somewhat awkwardly placed on account of being partly hidden in the leaf hollows. The water plant par-excellence upon which to find the Floscule is *Myriophyllum* which grows in dense masses in the brackish ditches in the vicinity of the Yare, where there is a network of these useful water-ways used for draining the marshes. I have found this "weed" in all parts of Norfolk and Suffolk; but while finding occasional tubes of *Melicerta* upon it have rarely met with the Floscule. My own experience is that it prefers the decidedly brackish and almost salt water to be found in ditches at the mouths of rivers. This, of course, does not apply to Lound Run and the lake at Fritton, but in these fresh-water situations the forms are not nearly so numerous or so fine as those found at Southtown which is a sure ground for them. In some recent gatherings I have simply taken a handful of *Myriophyllum* from a ditch and having separated two or three of the multiple leaves and placed them in a watch glass or micro-tank, simply revelled in their beauties. I counted as many as 47 Floscules on one "Frond" (pinnate leaf), and as there are scores of these "Fronds" on one stem, the gregariousness of the animal can be better appreciated than stated. Under a Rousselet compressorium (the best way to examine fixed Rotifers) and using a one inch objective I have frequently had as many as ten or twelve Floscules in the field at one time. This affords a unique and exceedingly fine opportunity of studying the animal as, if supplied with a fresh drop of water occasionally, it can be kept alive under continuous observation for several days.

April and May are the best months to find the Floscule in the above waters.

H. E. Hurrell



Excursion

Reports

● 2007-08 Field
Meeting location
Easton College
Indoor meetings



No Excursion Reports in this edition - look out for the 2008/2009 Programme. Venue change for indoor meetings - details later.

RESEARCH

Round-up

Research Committee Programme 2007

It has been decided to continue holding our field meetings on the last Monday of each month from March to November to allow for as full a range of studies in all fields of natural history at their most appropriate times of year.

The main study during 2007 will be a continuation of the work started for the Little Ouse Headwaters Project on various fen and grazing marshes on either side of the Little Ouse from its source downstream to the roadbridge between Blo Norton and Thelnetham. An April meeting has already taken place on the 30th, however, other LOHP meetings will be on the last Monday in each month from July-November. Please contact either myself or Janet Negal nearer the time for meeting places.

On Monday May 28th we are having a preliminary look at Moorgate Meadows on the Blickling Estate (See also Society main programme Saturday June 30th). These may well be visited further in 2008. Meet in the anglers car park at TG179296.

Mary Ghullam arranged the above meeting for us and also asked if we could do a survey of all forms of wildlife on Southrepps Common of which she is an honorary warden. For Southrepps Common meet in the small car park near the common TG251358 on June 11th and Sept. 16th, again both dates are Mondays.

On June 25th we return to Catfield Hall to survey South Marsh which had been missed last year. Meet at TG377213.

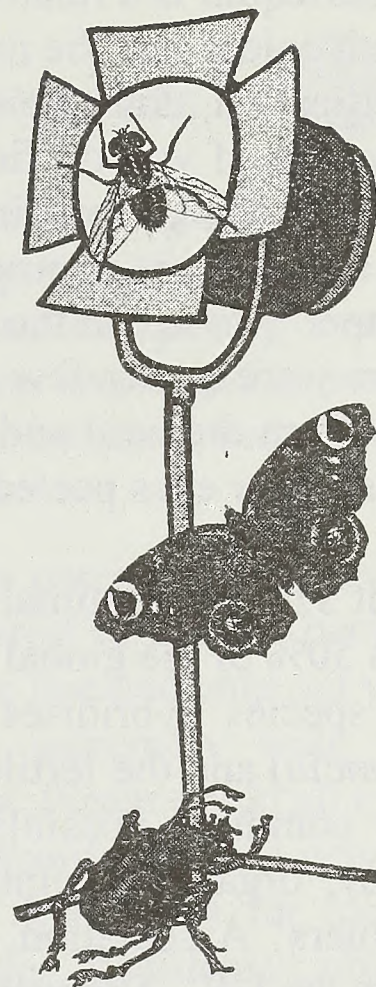
All meetings are timed for 10.30. All members are welcome whether an expert in particular fields or as an extra pair of eyes.

Alec Bull





There are as many types of naturalist as there are organisms for them to study, but whether you're an avid twitcher, a microscope-dependent mycologist or a rambler with a passing interest, you've all got one thing in common - you collect records. You might not keep a detailed list of everything you see and when you see it (you might not even write it down), but you do make the observations. And how useful these observations are – the UK leads the way in what's known in the business as 'Citizen Science', whereby members of the public collect data that can then be collated and analysed by professionals in order to further the conservation effort. There are already a huge number of different national schemes looking for willing recruits, covering a broad range of species and catering for all levels of expertise.



The aim of this column, which I hope to produce on a regular basis, is to highlight on-going surveys to which members of the NNNS can contribute and to tell you how to get involved. If you have any questions or would like help in registering for any of the surveys featured, then please feel free to contact me (details overleaf).

You're not from round here, are you?

Spring is fast approaching, accompanied by an increase in entomological activity with many species of butterfly now on the wing and ladybirds appearing in good numbers on hedges and bushes. So, it's a good time to keep an eye out for the latest addition to the British Coccinellid list, the harlequin ladybird (*Harmonia axyridis*). Billed as 'the most invasive ladybird on Earth' (how *do* they measure these things?), it was introduced to Europe from North America in 1998 and reached the UK in 2004. There are concerns about its impact on native species of ladybird, and the on-line harlequin ladybird Survey (www.harlequin-survey.org) has been set up to monitor the distribution of the invader as it spreads across the UK.



The harlequin is a relatively large ladybird, which can be very variable in terms of both colour and the number of spots it possesses. But if you're worried about identification, don't be – the survey web-pages contain an excellent identification guide. If you do find one, you can submit the information via the on-line recording form, providing details of where and when you found it. If you don't have access to the internet, then write to me and I can send you a copy of the form on paper. A map on the website shows the national distribution of observations – there were quite a few sightings in central and eastern Norfolk last year, but not many from the west and there have been very few so far this year, so remember to keep your eyes peeled!

And it's not only animal invaders that we're being asked to keep tabs on. Britain holds 50% of the global population of the bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*). This species hybridises with the introduced Spanish bluebell (*Hyacinthoides hispanica*) and the fertile hybrids produced are thought to be becoming increasingly common, possibly at the expense of our native species. The bluebell Survey, organised jointly by the Natural History Museum, Plantlife and the Ramblers' Association, aims to map the distribution of the different species within the UK. The website at:

<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/nature-online/british-natural-history/survey-bluebells/bluebells-exploring-british-wildlife.html>

provides a detailed identification key and a summary of the results for 2006. The on-line recording form was not up and running at the time of writing, but it will be available from April 5th, together with further details of what to record. Both the key and the recording forms are available free of charge as paper copies, so even if you don't have internet access, you can still take part – again, contact me for details.



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Blinded by the Light Moth Traps to Help Ground Beetle Records



The Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership is in the process of drafting Biodiversity Action Plans for two ground beetle species fortunate enough to be included on the UK biodiversity list. *Harpalus froelichii* (the brush-thighed seed eating beetle) and *Ophonus laticollis* (no English name, formerly known as *Harpalus punctatulus*) both occur predominantly in Breckland, with some isolated records from north west Norfolk.

The data for the distribution of the species is predictably patchy, and relies on records from a handful of recorders with a particular interest in ground beetles. However, this is a call to all moth trappers to cross over the line and help out your Coleopterist colleagues. Both these beetle species fly extremely well, and *Harpalus froelichii* has been caught in light traps in the past. Please could all moth trappers keep an eye out for these species, and pass any records to Pat Lorber at the Norfolk Biological Records Centre 01362 869292. Specimens for identification can be sent the county beetle recorder, Martin Collier, at Hillside Cottage, Syleham, Eye, Suffolk IP21 4LL, collierm.beetles@virgin.net, or to Dr Mark Telfer 10, Northall Road, Eaton Bray Dunstable Beds LU6 2DQ. mark@carabids.fsnet.co.uk. Please include relevant details e.g. date, locality and grid reference.

Heidi Thompson

The next issue of '*The Norfolk Natterjack*'
will be August 2007.

Please send all articles and notes to the editor as soon as possible by
July 1st 2007
to the following address:

Francis Farrow, 'Heathlands', 6 Havelock Road, Sheringham,
Norfolk, NR26 8QD
Email: francis.f@virgin.net

Please send all photographic material to:

Simon Harrap, 1 Norwich Road, Edgefield, Melton Constable,
Norfolk, NR22 2RP
Email: harrap@onetel.net

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